
CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS: SUMMER 1992

(Advance Report)

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The Food Stamp Program is the nation's largest food assistance program. In summer 1992, the Food Stamp Program served an average of 25.8 million people per month. During that summer, a food stamp household received an average of \$169 in benefits per month. Over \$20 billion were paid out in food stamps that year. In the past few years, the number of food stamp participants has grown rapidly, from 18.6 million persons in July 1989 to 27.4 million persons in March 1993.

Food stamps are made available to virtually all low-income households with few resources to supplement their food purchases and help them maintain a healthy diet. In summer 1992, food stamps represented approximately one-fourth of a household's total monthly resources (income plus food stamps). The combination of cash and food stamps would have moved one-quarter of food stamp households from below to above half the poverty line (Figure 1).

In summer 1992, over half of all food stamp participants were children (Figure 2), most of whom lived in single-parent families. The remaining participants were non-elderly adults (42 percent) or elderly adults, age 60 or more (7 percent).

I. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households

In summer 1992, the majority of food stamp households contained children (Table 1). Of these households, over two-thirds (67.1 percent) were single-parent homes, over one-quarter (27.3 percent) were multiple-adult homes, and the remaining households contained no members over the age of 17. Households with children received an average monthly food stamp benefit of \$225, reflecting their relatively large average size (3.4 persons). Single-parent homes (3 persons) received an average of \$214 in food stamps, and multiple-adult homes (4.6 persons) received an average of \$267.

Households containing elderly persons represented 15.4 percent of all food stamp households. The majority of households containing an elderly person (74.9 percent) were single-person homes, which received an average benefit of \$48, compared with households containing elderly and other persons, which received an average benefit of \$126. A substantial proportion of food stamp households contained disabled persons (10.1 percent); these households received an average benefit of \$114.

This brief was prepared by Nancy Heiser and Suzanne Smolkin of Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. The information presented in this brief is based on data collected by the Food and Nutrition Service for quality control purposes for Fiscal Year and summer (July and August) 1992.

II. Characteristics of Food Stamp Participants

Among adult participants (age 18 or more), women outnumbered men by about two to one (Table 2). Of the children participating, about one-third were preschool age (0 to 4), and two-thirds were of school age (5 to 17).

Close to half of the persons heading a food stamp household were white non-Hispanic (44.6 percent), about one-third were African-American non-Hispanic (35.4 percent), and slightly less than one-eighth were Hispanic (12.3 percent). The remaining household heads were Asian, Native American, or of another race or ethnicity (Table 3).

III. Income and Benefits of Food Stamp Households

The average monthly food stamp benefit in summer 1992 was \$169. The majority (73.9 percent) of food stamp households received monthly benefits of over \$100--36.2 percent received over \$200 (Table 4). Food stamp households' average monthly gross income was \$481 (Table 5). In 1992, 82 percent of all benefits went to households with children and six percent of all benefits went to households with elderly.

The majority of households (77.3 percent) received assistance payments from one or more of the following sources: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), General Assistance (GA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Unemployment Compensation, or some other payment such as veterans' benefits or educational loans. About one-fifth of all households had earned income. Nearly one-fifth of all households (17.4 percent) received Social Security payments. A substantial proportion (10.2 percent) had no income and thus received

the maximum food stamp benefit for their household size and location.

IV. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households by State

In 1992, half of all food stamp households were located in eight large states: California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas (Table 6). The average monthly food stamp benefit varied by State, reflecting differences in income, household size and composition, and expenses. Food stamp benefits were relatively high (greater than \$190) in Arizona, Delaware, Louisiana, and Texas, States with below average gross household incomes and above average household sizes. Average monthly food stamp benefits were lowest (less than \$137) in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont, States with above-average gross household incomes and average household size. In Alaska and Hawaii, the only two States where the maximum benefit is set higher because of higher costs of living, the average food stamp benefit was over \$240.

V. Description of and Participation in the Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program is unique among income maintenance programs in two important ways. First, it provides assistance to essentially all financially needy households without imposing nonfinancial categorical criteria. Second, it provides benefits in the form of coupons (instead of cash), which can be redeemed for food in any of over 200,000 authorized stores across the nation. The cost of providing food stamps to needy persons is funded fully by the Federal Government. Administrative costs are shared by Federal, State and local governments.

FIGURE 1

POVERTY STATUS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS
WITH AND WITHOUT FOOD STAMPS, SUMMER 1992

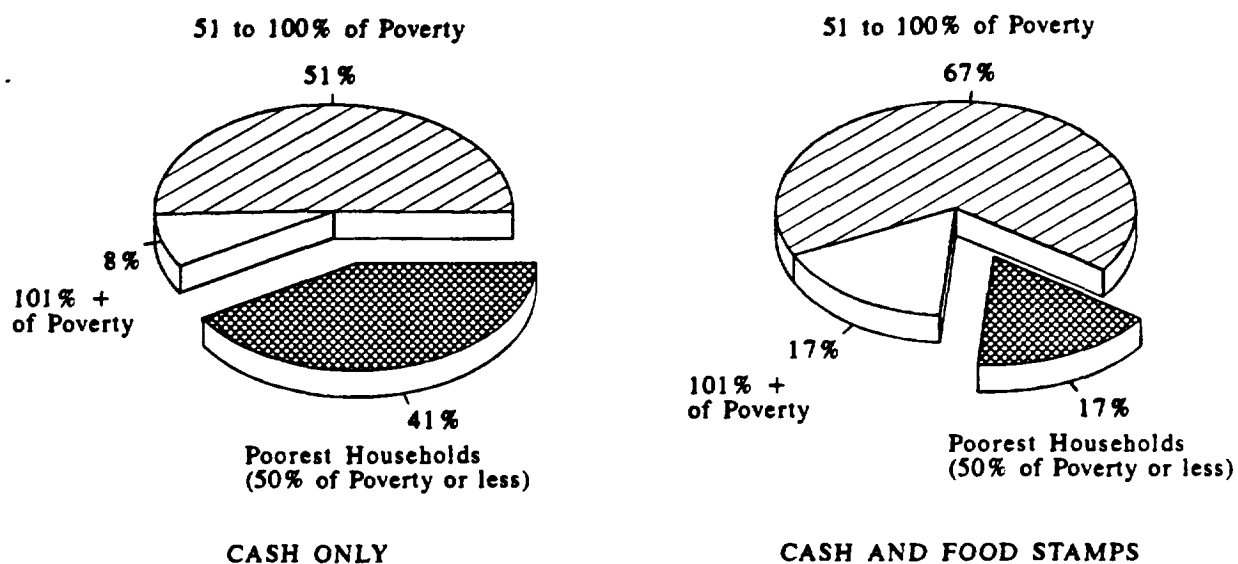
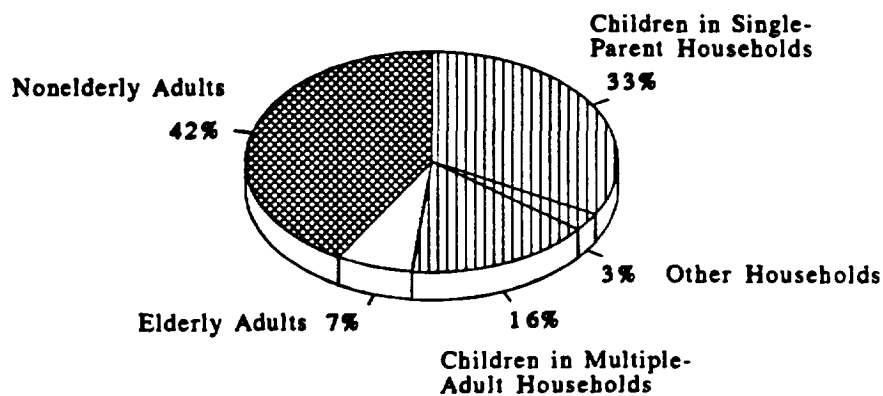


FIGURE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD STAMP PARTICIPANTS, SUMMER 1992



Eligibility. To be eligible for food stamps, a household's assets, gross income, and net income, which is based on gross income less deductions permitted under the Food Stamp Program, must not exceed specified levels that vary by household size, composition, and location. In addition, able-bodied members of the food stamp unit are required to register for work, and some are then required to participate in an employment and training program as a condition for receiving food stamps.

Food Stamp Benefit Computation and Issuance. Benefits are computed by subtracting 30 percent of a household's net income from the maximum benefit amount based on 103 percent of the June cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for a family of four, adjusted for different household sizes and locations. The TFP is based on the cost of a market basket that provides an economical and nutritious diet. In 1992, the maximum benefit for a family of four in the contiguous United States was \$370 per month. Food stamp participants receive their monthly benefits through the mail, directly from the local office, or through an electronic benefit transfer (which is similar to a bank card).

Change in Participation over Time. The number of persons participating in the Food Stamp Program has increased significantly since the late 1980s as did the number of unemployed persons and persons living in poverty (Figure 3). This increase in participation has been accompanied by changes in the composition of the Food Stamp Program caseload (Table 7). Households with children have remained a large proportion of the caseload and have increased slightly, whereas the proportion of households with an elderly member has declined slightly. A growing proportion of food stamp households have contained a disabled person reaching 10 percent in summer 1992.

VI. Data

The estimates presented here are based on data extracted from the Integrated Quality Control System, which is an ongoing review of food stamp households designed to measure the accuracy with which eligibility and benefit amount determinations are made. All estimates except State-level estimates are based on a summer (July and August) sample of 9,586 households. The State-level estimates are based on a full-year sample of 58,098 households.

Based on Food and Nutrition Service administrative records, the Food Stamp Program served 25.8 million persons in summer 1992. The figure of 26.1 million persons served by the program in summer 1992, as presented in the attached tables, is based on the Food Stamp Quality Control sample and varies from the administrative figure because it is a sample estimate weighted by households rather than persons.

FIGURE 3
FOOD STAMP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS,
UNEMPLOYED PERSONS, AND POOR PERSONS

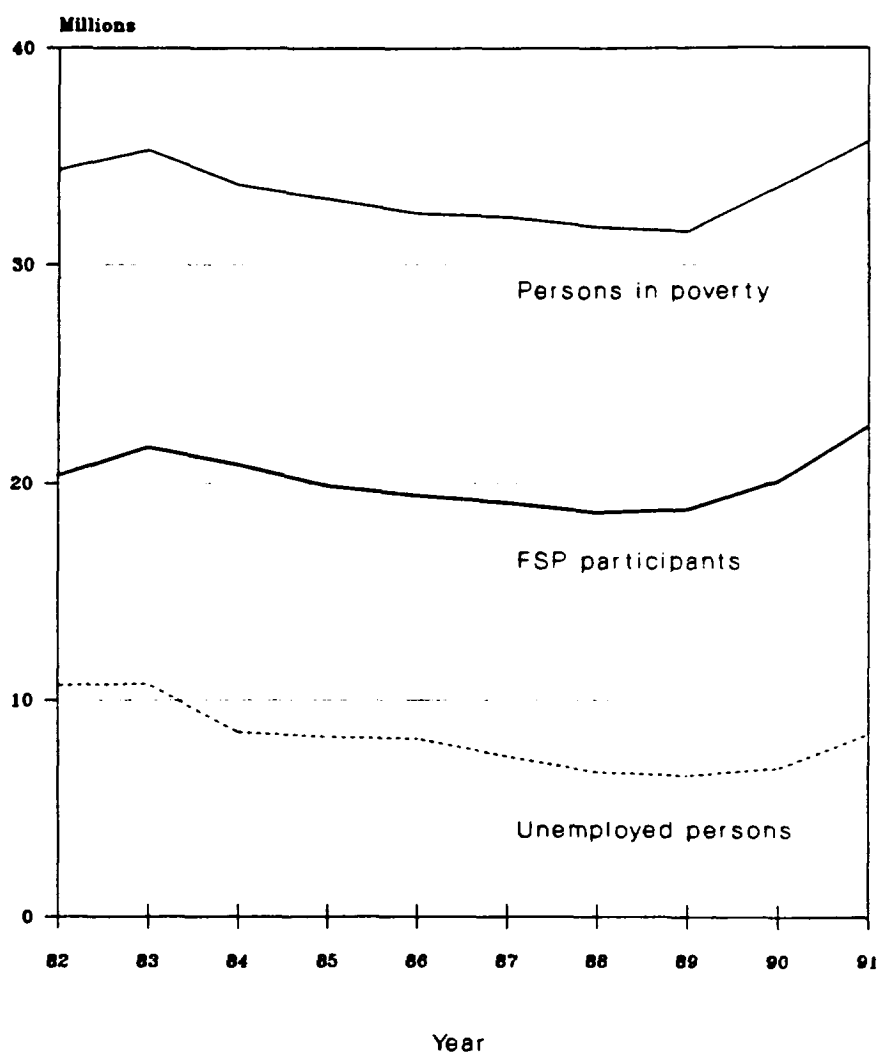


Table 1 – Selected Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1992

Household type	Participating households		Average monthly values (dollars)			Average household size (persons)
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Food stamp benefit	Gross income	Net income	
Total	10,238	100.0	169	481	258	2.5
Children	6,310	61.6	225	558	314	3.4
Single-parent families	4,234	41.4	214	489	251	3.0
Multiple-adult families	1,723	16.8	267	768	492	4.6
Other	353	3.4	142	357	194	2.0
Elderly	1,575	15.4	67	509	279	1.4
Living alone	1,179	11.5	48	458	226	1.0
Not living alone	396	3.9	126	662	437	2.6
Disabled	1,035	10.1	114	611	381	2.4
Living alone	505	4.9	51	447	205	1.0
Not living alone	529	5.2	174	767	549	3.7
Other	1,898	18.5	103	227	84	1.2
Single-person	1,606	15.7	93	198	65	1.0
Multiple-person	292	2.9	157	386	192	2.1

Source: Summer 1992 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 2 – Gender and Age of Food Stamp Participants, Summer 1992

Age	All participants		Female		Male	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	26,091	100.0	15,394	100.0	10,692	100.0
Children (0-17)	13,497	51.7	6,666	43.3	6,828	63.9
1-4	5,209	20.0	2,597	16.9	2,611	24.4
5-17	8,288	31.8	4,068	26.4	4,216	39.4
Adults (18 or more)	12,584	48.2	8,719	56.6	3,863	36.1
18-35	6,886	26.4	4,968	32.3	1,916	17.9
36-59	3,964	15.2	2,501	16.2	1,463	13.7
60 or more	1,734	6.6	1,251	8.1	484	4.5
Unknown	10	0.0	9	0.1	1	0.0

Source: Summer 1992 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 3 -- Race/Ethnicity of Household Heads of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1992

Race of household head	Participating households	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	10,238	100.0
White, Non-Hispanic	4,565	44.6
African-American, Non-Hispanic ..	3,621	35.4
Hispanic	1,261	12.3
Asian	222	2.2
Native American	113	1.1
Other	456	4.4

Source: Summer 1992 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 4 -- Monthly Food Stamp Benefits of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1992

Monthly food stamp benefit	Participating households	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	10,238	100.0
\$0-50	1,549	15.1
\$51-100	1,214	11.9
\$101-150	2,267	22.1
\$151-200	1,499	14.6
\$201-250	1,425	13.9
\$251-300	1,045	10.2
\$301 +	1,239	12.1

Source: Summer 1992 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 5 – Selected Economic Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1992

Income source	Participating households		Persons in households with source		Average income (dollars)		Average food stamp benefit (dollars)	Average household size (persons)
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Gross	From source		
Total	10,238	100.0	26,091	100.0	481	(n/a)	169	2.5
Earned income	2,088	20.4	7,004	26.8	766	621	187	3.4
Wages and salaries	1,939	18.9	6,560	25.1	778	640	189	3.4
Self-employment	99	1.0	347	1.3	609	275	219	3.5
Other earned income	70	0.7	171	0.7	669	426	110	2.5
Unearned income	7,913	77.3	20,262	77.7	504	452	165	2.6
Aid to Families with Dependent Children ...	4,055	39.6	13,577	52.0	508	384	231	3.3
General Assistance	798	7.8	1,159	4.4	331	225	116	1.5
Supplemental Security Income	1,923	18.8	3,693	14.2	564	317	91	1.9
Social Security	1,780	17.4	3,122	12.0	567	430	77	1.8
Unemployment	316	3.1	973	3.7	689	508	154	3.1
Other unearned income ...	1,351	13.2	3,549	13.6	557	227	157	2.6
No Income	1,047	10.2	1,738	6.7	0	0	169	1.7

Source: Summer 1992 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 6 – Selected Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households by State, Fiscal Year 1992

State	Total (thousands)	Percent of all households	Average monthly amount					Average house- hold size (persons)
			Food stamp benefit (dollars)	Gross income (dollars)	Net income (dollars)	Total deduction (dollars)	Countable assets (dollars)	
Total	10,049	100.0	170	479	258	250	91	2.6
Alabama	208	2.1	177	464	255	243	76	2.6
Alaska	12	0.1	243	848	563	326	92	3.0
Arizona	166	1.7	192	474	252	257	69	2.8
Arkansas	102	1.0	161	535	329	228	163	2.7
California	958	9.5	150	599	380	237	71	2.8
Colorado	102	1.0	187	491	232	289	47	2.7
Connecticut	86	0.9	125	602	369	239	95	2.4
Delaware	19	0.2	192	431	203	264	84	2.6
Dist. of Col.	38	0.4	160	396	229	192	13	2.4
Florida	553	5.5	183	445	208	279	120	2.6
Georgia	288	2.9	179	450	245	238	98	2.6
Hawaii	39	0.4	253	617	365	271	251	2.3
Idaho	26	0.3	181	506	275	271	161	2.8
Illinois	488	4.9	161	390	197	228	109	2.3
Indiana	160	1.6	194	489	271	248	90	2.9
Iowa	76	0.8	154	553	317	253	112	2.6
Kansas	68	0.7	166	513	277	256	97	2.6
Kentucky	197	2.0	178	457	279	206	104	2.7
Louisiana	278	2.8	207	451	237	246	47	3.0
Maine	58	0.6	153	528	262	298	88	2.4
Maryland	147	1.5	183	385	176	236	13	2.4
Massachusetts	183	1.8	145	559	313	259	168	2.4
Michigan	405	4.0	173	444	213	272	133	2.4
Minnesota	128	1.3	147	530	304	249	212	2.5
Mississippi	196	2.0	173	486	281	236	113	2.7
Missouri	214	2.1	178	471	254	239	116	2.6
Montana	25	0.3	160	503	276	245	144	2.5
Nebraska	43	0.4	153	539	300	259	222	2.5
Nevada	36	0.4	174	435	214	273	52	2.5
New Hampshire	25	0.2	135	496	290	240	134	2.3
New Jersey	201	2.0	176	453	210	264	30	2.5
New Mexico	77	0.8	189	489	290	228	121	2.9
New York	855	8.5	153	521	239	294	33	2.3
North Carolina	236	2.3	166	487	275	236	178	2.6
North Dakota	18	0.2	165	527	274	276	510	2.5
Ohio	529	5.3	175	412	211	233	55	2.5
Oklahoma	135	1.3	170	475	259	251	81	2.6
Oregon	114	1.1	160	455	225	270	123	2.3
Pennsylvania	495	4.9	158	468	234	256	98	2.3
Rhode Island	38	0.4	147	500	270	243	229	2.3
South Carolina	133	1.3	182	475	270	233	113	2.8
South Dakota	19	0.2	177	534	282	276	279	2.8
Tennessee	280	2.8	168	420	240	215	104	2.5
Texas	891	8.9	193	418	228	243	56	2.7
Utah	44	0.4	182	521	300	248	142	2.9
Vermont	23	0.2	136	632	374	273	192	2.5
Virginia	206	2.0	156	453	253	230	113	2.4
Washington	178	1.8	164	484	244	261	80	2.5
West Virginia	117	1.2	181	468	271	227	65	2.7
Wisconsin	123	1.2	156	600	362	254	116	2.8
Wyoming	12	0.1	173	532	309	239	213	2.8

Source: 1992 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 7 -- Selected Characteristics of Food Stamp Households Over Time

Year	Total		Children		Elderly		Disabled
	Participants (thousands)	Households (thousands)	Children (percent of all participants)	Households with children (percent of all)	Elderly (percent of all participants)	Households with elderly (percent of all)	Households with disabled (percent of all)
Summer 1992	26,091	10,238	51.8	61.6	6.6	15.4	10.1
Summer 1991	24,157	9,204	52.2	61.4	7.1	16.6	9.2
Summer 1990	20,737	7,973	49.4	61.0	7.5	17.5	9.1
Summer 1989	18,652	7,213	49.2	60.1	8.4	19.5	9.2
Summer 1988	18,545	7,015	50.3	60.9	8.1	19.1	8.4
Winter 1988	19,063	7,071	50.9	61.3	8.3	20.3	8.7
Summer 1987	18,748	6,881	51.2	61.2	8.3	20.5	8.4
Summer 1986	19,385	7,101	50.8	61.2	8.4	20.2	7.1
Summer 1985	19,040	7,121	49.5	59.2	8.9	21.4	6.4

Source: Food Stamp Quality Control samples.
